

HV1711

A HE TEACHES THE BLIND TO FARM
by
Ray Anderson



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HOUSE FOR THE BLIND**

RAY'S RAMBLINGS



Photos: Harold Rueppel

Here's a school that teaches hope; it's Fred Ward's Farm School for the Blind at Mason, Ohio. Ward, center, and Ray stand by as Gerhard Richter shows how he measures lumber.

He teaches the blind to farm

GERHARDT RICHTER can see, but only after a fashion. Before long he will be stone blind; he has what doctors call tubular vision.

Just the same, he operates his own newly purchased small farm, and will continue to run it with family help after his eyesight is gone. The family consists of Mrs. Richter and two daughters, 8 and 10. Their eyes are OK.

The farm is nine acres in Watonwan County, Minn. The house is modern—city water, sewer, electricity. Outbuildings are modest, but adequate.

"Can you get it paid for?" I asked Richter one day, knowing that he has to raise \$600 a year for 18 years, besides taxes and other expenses.

"I'm dead sure of it," he replied. "Fred Ward says I can, and when Mr. Ward says so, I know I'll get it done."

Richter then went on to tell me that "before I met Fred Ward I figured a man was all washed up when he went blind. Now I know better."

"I know now that I can get around. And I know that I can do almost anything that I really want to do."

The man's failing eyes were moist with gratitude for the "new lease on life" he'd had from Ward.

I first met Richter and Ward together last spring at the "Farm School for the Blind" that Ward manages near Mason, Ohio.

Fred Ward, himself, is totally blind,

and has been for more than 30 years. Richter was at that time one of two students under Ward's guidance. The other is Paul Lanier, of Lawrence County, Ohio. Lanier, whose eyes also are rapidly failing, is running a poultry farm on his own.

This unique "agricultural college" is three years old. It boasts only a half-dozen graduates so far. Most of these "grads" are on their own farms, or working.

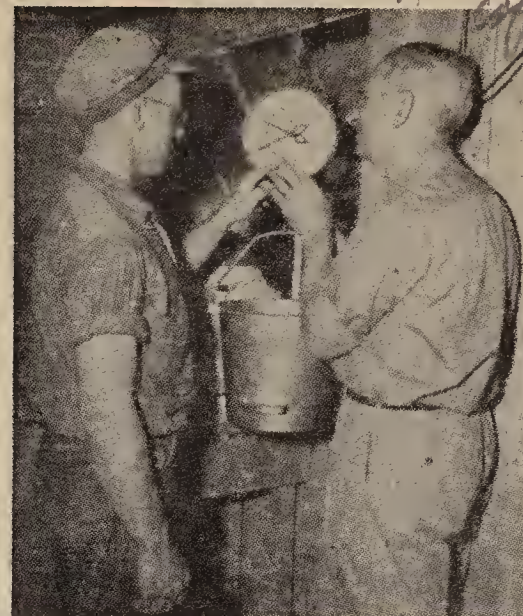
I saw amazing things that day in Ohio.

It was startling, for example, to watch Ward show Richter how to operate a portable electric high-speed rotary saw in making a feed bin for the cow barn.

The precise sureness with which they measured the lumber, bored holes, fitted hinges, was surprising.

They tended baby chicks, brought in the cows, used a milking machine, weighed the milk, made records—did practically everything a person ordinarily does on a farm.

I came away convinced a blind man can handle any farm chore or tool. But more inspiring than what I saw that day was what I sensed—a feeling of cheer and confidence that radiated from Ward to the men he worked with. Both Ward and the farm "are wonderful," as Richter and Lanier say. Ward believes that



"Get a scale with raised numerals, and you can weigh feed, milk, produce, anything," Ward tells Richter.

the School will soon be regarded as a source of reliable farm hands.

"A blind man can do almost anything on a farm when he is with a sighted person," Ward told me.

"He can run a poultry farm by himself, or a dairy farm. He can raise small stock like rabbits, and men with more than ordinary ability can handle a truck farm."

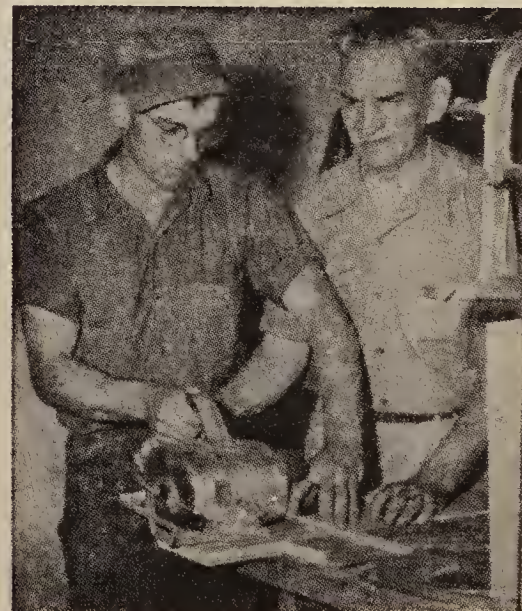
Richter supplemented his income this year by working with a repair and building crew for Tilden Farms in Minnesota.

He is stocking his nine-acre place with two sows, 450 chickens, and a couple of cows.

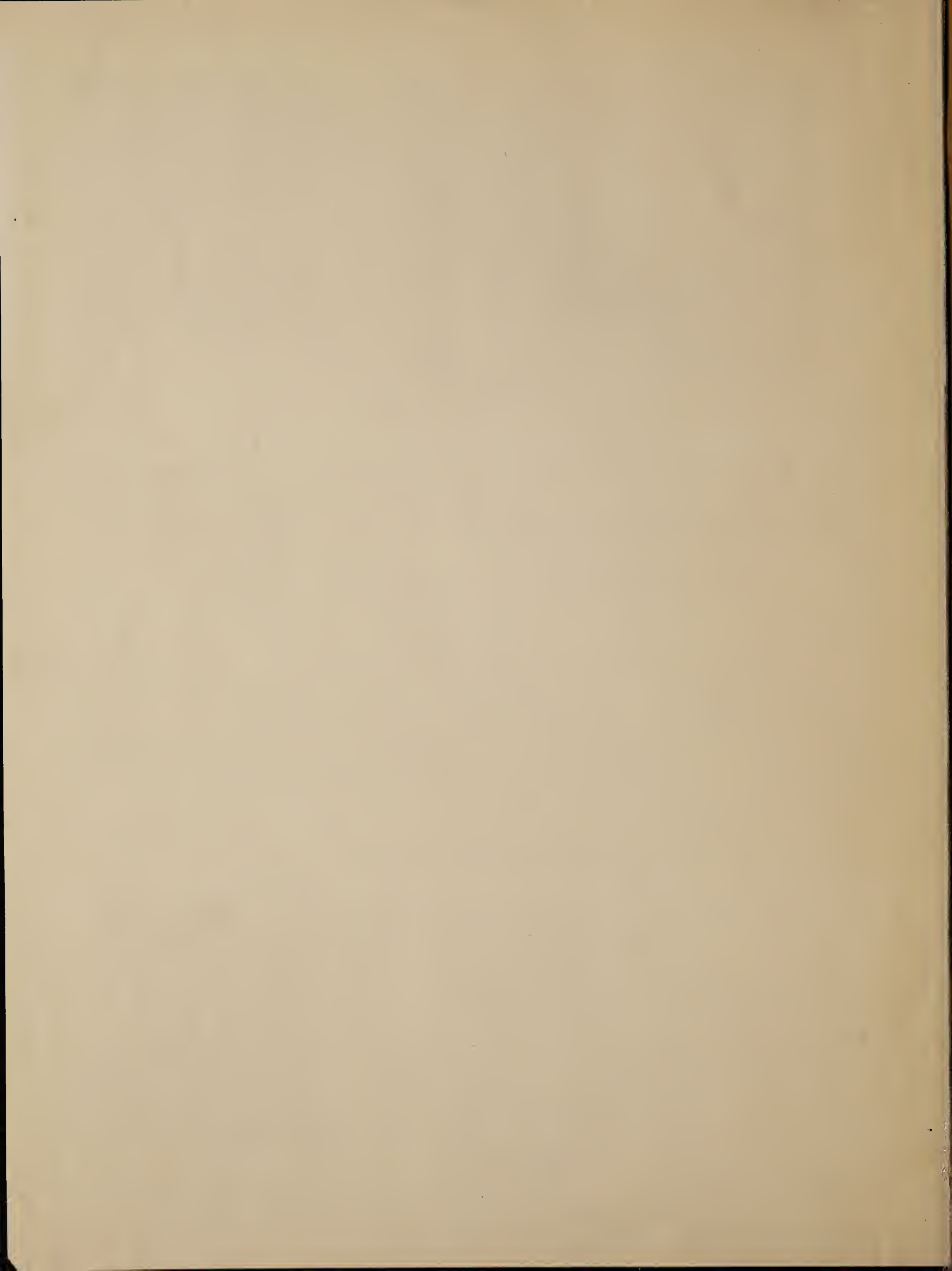
He'll do all right. His short course with Fred Ward gave him the assurance that any man must have, blind or seeing, to make a go of farming these days.

Personally I salute the Farm School for the Blind, Mason, Ohio. May its good work go on, and on!

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A high-speed saw is a ticklish job for anyone, but Ward insists that his pupils learn how to handle one.



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